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Reviewing Geography Education's Relationships with Citizenship to (Re)Imagine Possibilities for Future Research

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the relationships between geography education and citizenship *via* a scoping review of 60 studies. Literature focused on a range of countries, primarily in Europe, and five interconnected themes were identified: citizenship as a purpose of geography education; engagement with injustices and issues; constructions of 'the child'; political literacy and participation; and identities in relation to place, nation, and empire. The review highlights a lack of direct engagement with children's perspectives and calls for future research that centers children's (lived) citizenship and examines how we can develop children's knowledges of citizenship, political literacy and participation through school geography.

KEYWORDS

Geography education; citizenship; children's geographies; schools; scoping review

Introduction

Children and young people's citizenship is an important area of focus for researchers, policy makers, and practitioners in a range of countries and contexts (Biesta et al. 2009; Skelton 2010; Benwell and Hopkins 2016; Kallio and Mills 2016; Wood 2022). Schools are often a focus for this work, as many children learn about citizenship through their studies and interactions with education spaces, governance structures and people. As one of "humanity's big ideas" and a discipline that studies the world "both near and far" (Bonnett 2023, 6), it has long been argued that school geography has a role in citizenship education (Lambert and Machon 2002; Anderson et al. 2008; Pykett 2010; Shin and Bednarz 2018). However, from nation building to global citizenship, conceptualizations of the nature and purpose of geography education's connections with citizenship have varied.

Drawing on a scoping review of 60 studies, this article seeks to examine the range of research activity on the relationships between geography education and citizenship, and to identify key themes in the literature. We now set out the rationale for the review by exploring the relationships between children, citizenship and geography education, before introducing debates about geography's role in citizenship education. We use the terms children and young people interchangeably to reflect the literature engaged with, whilst

recognizing that citizenship may be shaped by factors including a person's age.

Children, citizenship and geography education

Children's citizenship and education

There are longstanding tensions around children's citizenship, with young people sometimes being positioned as "outside full citizenship entitlements" due to factors including their age, social status, and inability to vote (Wood 2022, 2). Childhood is not always conceptualized "as a political stage in life" (Skelton 2013, 130), and children's opportunities for formal and public participation may be constrained in some contexts (Wood 2016). Yet, young people's lives are entangled with social, legal and political landscapes, and "intimately connected to produced structures and institutions" that shape (their) citizenship (Howerton and Purdum 2023, 8).

Children encounter citizenship as a part of their everyday lives (Yarwood 2013; Wood 2016; Kallio et al. 2020), including through play, stories, art, media, and their experiences in, and of, place(s). A young person may, for example, listen to a national anthem at the start of a sports event, identify with a place-based identity (e.g., New Yorker), or see advertisements from political candidates on social media. A child may not be a citizen of the country in which they live or attend school; they may experience or learn about migration due to conflict or socio-economic inequalities; or they may

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hear discourse from far-right politicians arguing “the need to put ‘our people’ first and ‘take back control’” (Osler and Starkey 2018, 31).

In a range of domestic, public and institutional spaces, children can also encounter power relations that shape (their) citizenship. These relations may be gendered, racialized, ableist, and/or classed, with adulthood recognized as a “specific form of discrimination” that “manifests itself in derogatory behaviour towards younger people, but (which) can also become entrenched in social, legal, and institutional structures” (Meade 2023, 98). However, from discussions over the family dinner table to being on a school council or participating in climate strikes, young people can, and do, take political action (Oswell 2012; Skelton 2013; Walker 2020; Wood 2022). Young people are “political actors who resist, rework, and show resilience” in a range of spaces, including “in the face of harmful political and legal decisions passed down to them from adults (Katz 2004)” (Howerton and Purdum 2023, 8).

Children learn about politics, citizenship, and democracy through everyday life (Biesta et al. 2009; Benwell and Hopkins 2016; Kallio et al. 2020). However, for the last 75 years, conceptualizations of children as ‘citizens in the making’ (Marshall 1950) have “continued to play an important role in educational policy and practice” (Biesta et al. 2009, 6). The social construction of childhood as a period of becoming has shaped how young people have been positioned in, and through, schooling (Mills 2021; Jerome and Starkey 2022). Formal education has, at times, failed to truly engage with children’s experiences of being citizens in places and communities (Biesta et al. 2009; Pykett 2009a, 2009b; Hammond 2022), and schools can be characterized by rules that promote conformity and compliance (Kulz 2017; Morris and McGowan 2023), which may impact upon children’s opportunities to act as citizens (Hart 1992). Yet education also has “an inciting form of power” (Pykett 2012, 31) due to its role in developing young people’s capacities to think and act, thus having the potential to support children’s citizenship today and in their futures.

Geography education and citizenship

Education systems are often defined by their underpinning aims and the “concepts developed through subject knowledge (including skills and values)” (Slater 2002, 57). In schools, citizenship may be conceptualized as a discrete subject, as principles that are taught, or ideas which guide curricula decision-making (Staehele and Hammett 2010). As teaching also has a pastoral dimension, teachers may consider the citizenship status of young people in their care – particularly if there are threats to their safety—while also considering children’s rights, feelings of belonging, and participation.

Geography is constructed and taught in varying ways across different education systems and schools. For example, geography is sometimes taught in an integrated way in elementary schools or may be conceptualized as part of social studies or the sciences in high schools. However, geography, history, and social studies, as school subjects, have all “laid

claims to having crucial contributions” to producing “good citizens” (Marsden 2002, 11), and a significant body of literature has examined the relationships between geography education and citizenship. For example, work has considered the relationships between citizenship, identities and place(s) (Pykett 2010; Shin and Bednarz 2018); examined the teaching of geopolitics in schools (Castree et al. 2023; Saddington and McConnell 2025); and argued for pedagogies of enquiry to be used to support children in acting on matters which concern them (Roberts 2023; Davies and Willy 2024). Literature has also examined how representations of citizenship in curricula and texts have seen school geography serve the interests of nationalism and imperialism (Benwell and Hopkins 2016; Dorling and Tomlinson 2020). Recent work has considered the impacts of these representations on (young) people’s imaginations of the world, and how we teach the histories of geography (Puttick 2024).

Citizenship is also considered in debates about the value of geography to a person’s education (Lambert and León 2023; Béneker et al. 2024). Anderson et al. (2008, 31), for example, argue that geography has a role in creating “the language and intellectual space for explorations of the meaning, spatiality and contextualisation of what citizenship is, where it plays a role and what future citizenship rights might or might not entail”. In addition, Maude (2016) connects geography education to citizenship in a typology of powerful geographical knowledge. He does this in two ways: first, he implicitly references citizenship through discussion of informed participation, arguing that geography can be powerful when it equips young people to engage in “debates on significant local, national, and global issues” (75). Second, he explicitly mentions global citizenship, suggesting that geography education fosters “knowledge of the world” (75)—though this notion remains underexplored in his discussion.

These illustrative examples demonstrate that conceptualizations of the nature and purpose of citizenship in geography education vary widely and may be theorized to different degrees. It is therefore important to identify and understand the differences in framings of citizenship in geography education research, as they can shape whether ‘the child’ is constructed as being or becoming a citizen in education – and, ultimately, what, and how, children study in geography.

Introducing the research

To examine the extent and range of literature on the relationships between geography education and citizenship (Puttick and Talks 2022; Weir et al. 2023), we conducted a scoping review which included a total of 60 studies. Through the scoping review, we sought to provide “an overview of the available evidence, identifying key concepts and highlighting research gaps” (Hunt et al. 2023, 6), as well as making suggestions for future research directions. The scoping review was part of a wider project which also analyzed the positioning of (children’s) citizenship in national geography curricula in England and Scotland. While the policy analysis is reported in a separate publication (Hammond & Quirke, *in review*), we highlight it here as it informed the

methodological decisions which are detailed in the following sections. This includes the choice of database and inclusion/exclusion criteria used.

Stage one: Identifying the research question

To guide the review, we set ourselves the question: *how have the relationships between geography education and citizenship been conceptualized in the literature?* We considered citizenship in its broadest possible sense, with the intention of including work from a variety of contexts to provide an overview of research activity. In terms of the methodology for the review, we followed the steps set out by Levac et al. (2010), as described below (with the optional consultation in stage six omitted). While consultation is an important dimension of academic rigor, it can also be “unclear when, how and why to consult with stakeholders, and how to analyze and integrate these data with the findings” (Levac et al. 2010, 7). As such, we considered the scoping review as a prelude to the policy analysis and as a support with identifying areas for future research.

The field of geography education research seeks to examine how geography is constructed, conceived, taught, experienced, imagined and assessed in schools, universities and other education spaces (Puttick 2022). Citizenship, for its part, is a “complex and contested term” (Anderson et al. 2008, 34), with definitions and understandings of citizenship shaped by framings and the contexts in which they are (re)produced (Pykett et al. 2010; Staeheli 2011). However, there is “growing recognition” that citizenship should be understood “as a set of relationships through which it is constructed – often beyond territorial borders” (Kallio et al. 2020, 714). Beaman (2016, 850) argues that there are “four dimensions of contemporary citizenship: formal legal status, rights, political participation, and sense of belonging”, highlighting that citizenship might be felt, experienced and negotiated differently by different people in different spaces. This framing also reflects the fact that relationships are in a constant state of “becoming and change” (Katz 1996, 491). As such, rather than following one definition of citizenship, for this review, the focus on relationships intended to provide insight into how citizenship is conceptualized in geography education, and underlying motivations for its inclusion.

Stage two: Identifying relevant studies

In June 2024, we searched the British Education Index (BEI), using the search terms “geograph*” (as an inclusive term which incorporates geography and geographies), “citizen*” (which incorporates citizen(s) and citizenship) and “education”. The BEI returned 219 results, with a further six studies identified *via* citation searching (i.e., from the reference lists of included studies). This process pointed us to a relevant special issue of the professional journal *Primary Geography* on “Britain and Britishness”. Given the focus on education policy in England and Scotland in the second part of the project, the BEI was selected as a database as it “covers all aspects of educational policy and administration, evaluation

and assessment, technology and special educational needs” (EBSCO, n.d.). As the BEI mostly focuses on journals “published in the UK, along with some international literature” (EBSCO n.d.), we acknowledge this choice of database may have led to a British skew in the literature reviewed, and that some grey literature or literature published in geographical journals may have been missed through this search. We also note the importance of further research in this area, not least as the positioning of geography and citizenship in different education systems, times and places may result in literature describing the relationships in different ways—e.g., through focusing on connections between social studies and civics.

Whilst research in geography education is often conducted by scholars working in faculties of education – or less often, faculties of geography – educators working in schools and other education spaces also contribute to debates. A significant proportion of research in geography education is self- or un- funded, and/or conducted by graduate students (Butt 2020). For this reason, professional journals such as *Primary Geography* and *Teaching Geography*, published by the Geographical Association in England, are an important source of dialogue. However, these journals do not contain abstracts and therefore were outliers in the screening process. To support their inclusion, we used ChatGPT 4o to create abstracts using the prompt “can you read the article and summarize it into a 150–200 word abstract”. Mindful of potential issues when using AI, such as hallucinations, the abstracts were checked for accuracy by a member of the research team.

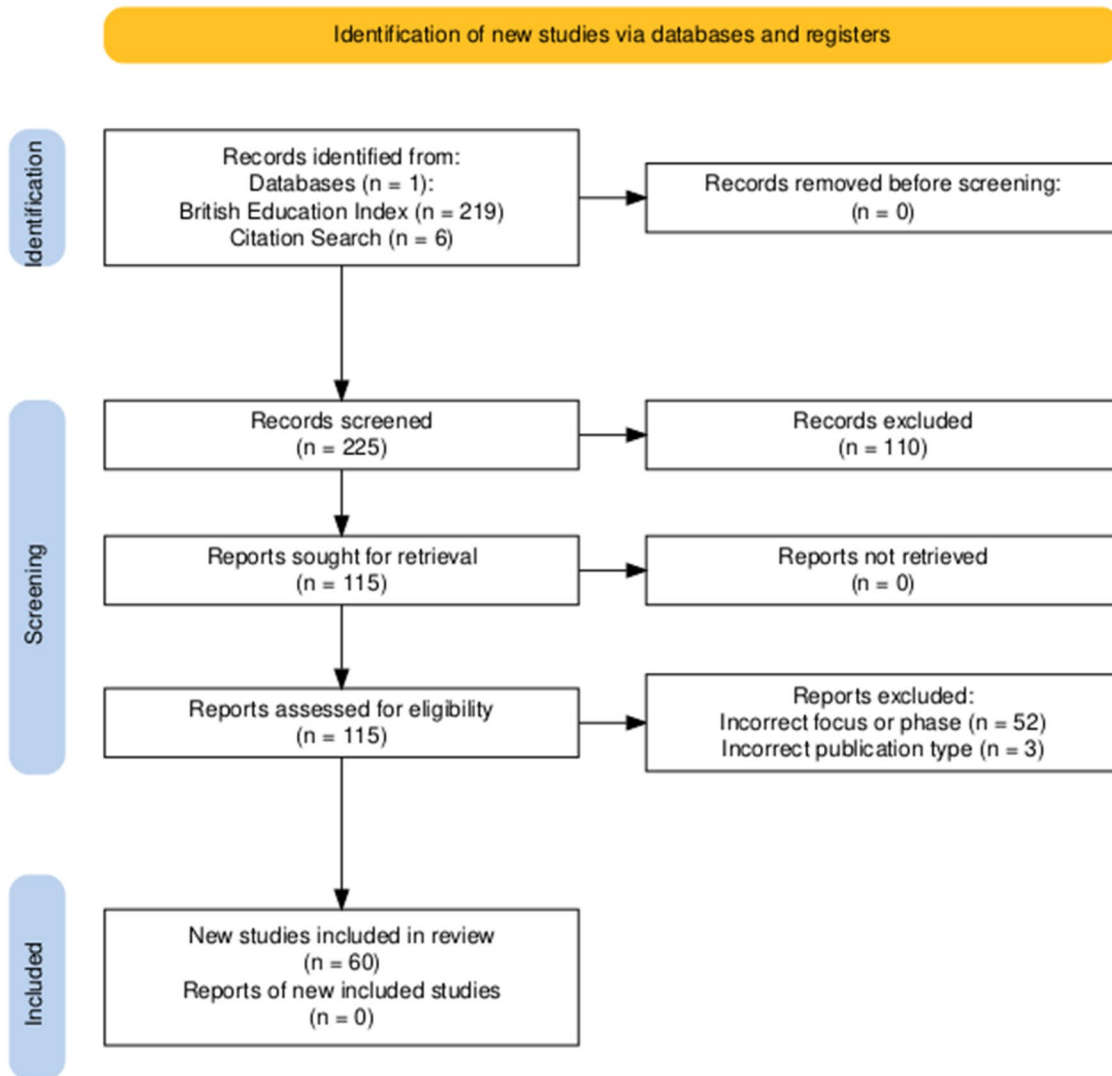
Stage three: Study selection

The research team met to discuss criteria for inclusion and exclusion at the start of the study selection process (Levac et al. 2010). The criteria were refined through an iterative process: the research team reviewed titles and abstracts before meeting to discuss any ambiguities. The inclusion/exclusion criteria are set out in Table 1. It is important to note that whilst we were keen to include articles from across the globe, we only reviewed articles written in English. We also made the decision to focus on primary and lower secondary education, as these are the phases of education in which geography is a compulsory area of study in the countries we focus on in the policy analysis.

Two authors performed title and abstract screening of the 225 studies identified through the BEI and citation searching process. Of these, 110 were excluded, meaning that 115 were moved forward for full text review (completed by the same two authors). As detailed in the PRISMA chart (Figure 1), 55 studies were excluded following the full text review. The majority were excluded due to having the wrong focus (e.g., lacking focus on either citizenship or geography education) or for referring to the wrong education phase (e.g., university-level geography education or upper secondary). Three studies were the wrong publication type (e.g., an editorial) or the wrong study design (e.g., a review paper). Following the full text review, 60 studies were taken forward for data extraction and charting. We present details of the studies’ characteristics after setting out the methodology.

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

	Inclusion	Exclusion
Time period	Unlimited	N/A
Language	English	Studies written in languages other than English
Location	Everywhere	N/A
Education phase	Early years, primary and lower secondary education (up to and including young people aged 14)	Other phases of education (young people over 14 years of age)
Study focus	The relationships between geography education and citizenship	Studies not focused on the relationships between geography education and citizenship
Ethical clearance	Must have ethical approval, unless a theoretical piece	Studies without ethical approval, unless a theoretical piece
Publication type	Empirical or conceptual studies reported in journal articles, book chapters, or articles in professional journals	Whole books (monographs and edited collections) or PhD or Master theses (excluded due to time constraints) Editorials or reviews (including book reviews -excluded as the focus was not on peer reviews of literature or research)

**Figure 1.** PRISMA chart (Haddaway et al., 2022) for the scoping review process.

Stage four: Extracting and charting the data

A draft charting form was developed to record the key information of the included studies – i.e., the variables which could help to respond to the research question (Levac et al. 2010). Categories of data to be extracted covered both meta-data and findings from the studies. For meta-data, we extracted data to support us in mapping study characteristics. This included the publication year; whether the article

was a professional/academic publication; the geographic location(s) of the study; the education phase(s) and education setting(s) focused on; methods used; any data sets engaged with; the focus of the study; and the name of the subject/project.

We then extracted data pertaining to the findings of the studies. Through an inductive and iterative process, we developed categories to support us in engaging with key themes in the articles and responding to the research

question. These categories were: definitions of citizenship; motivations for citizenship in geography education, constructions of the child (e.g., ‘active citizen’); relationships between geography/geographies and citizenship; and conclusions. To trial the form, two researchers independently charted data from 10% of the included articles (6 studies) on an Excel spreadsheet. They then met to discuss how well the form had captured the required data and adapted the form to be able to document unforeseen, useful data which arose. One researcher then charted data from the remaining 54 studies.

Stage five: Collating, summarizing, and reporting the results

According to Levac et al. (2010, 6), stage five is the “most extensive of the scoping review process”. It is organized around three steps: “analysing the data, reporting results, and applying meaning to the results” (Levac et al. 2010, 6). For this review, first we analyzed the studies’ characteristics (meta-data), to get a sense of the overall research landscape. This provided a picture of commonly used study designs and common sources of knowledge on the topic (e.g., professional journals), as well as the geographic and educational contexts referenced in the scholarship.

Following this summary, we coded and analyzed the studies’ findings under each data category (e.g., motivations for citizenship education). Data were coded multiple times if there were references to multiple participants, methods, contexts and so on. Analysis found overlap between some of the codes identified under each category. For example, the theme of ‘recognizing and valuing diversity and plurality in communities’ was classified as both a ‘focus of the study’ and a ‘motivation for citizenship in geography education’. Similarly, ‘affecting change, challenging oppression/discrimination’ was both a ‘motivation for citizenship in geography education’ and connected to ‘constructions of the child (e.g., as active citizen)’.

To reduce overlap, through an inductive process, we grouped codes together into five interconnected and overarching themes which we use to frame the findings section below. They are: (1) citizenship as informing the purpose of geography education; (2) citizenship and engaging with injustices, issues and events in the world; (3) citizenship and constructions of ‘the child’ in geography education; (4) supporting political literacy and participation in, and through, geography; and, finally, (5) citizenship and the relationships between identities and place, nation and empire. We now move on to present a summary of the study characteristics, before reporting the findings of the review. Following this, we set out how the findings “relate to the overall study purpose” and identify implications for future research (Levac et al. 2010, 4).

Study characteristics

Of the 60 articles analyzed, 17 were published in professional journals, with the rest being published in peer-reviewed

academic journals. 58 of the articles focused on formal education and two on community education. One article focused on early years, 21 on primary, 18 lower secondary, 15 primary and secondary, and five did not specify the education phase. Most articles analyzed were theoretical in nature (35). Of the empirical studies, 11 involved teachers as participants, one teacher educators, one parents/carers, nine children, two education officials/policy makers, one geographers, and two professionals working in climate change.

Studies were generally small scale, with only seven having more than 20 participants, and only one article directly engaging with data produced by children (e.g., drawings, maps or writing). Where sources of data were reported, the majority (19) focused on curricula analysis; 17 of which were national curricula, one state curricula and one curriculum from a freedom school (see below). One article focused on inspection reports, one assessment data, three textbooks, one personal reflections, one literature, and four historical documents.

Literature on the relationships between geography education and citizenship was relatively recent, with the earliest article identified published in 1991 and the latest in 2023. Most studies focused on at least one country in Europe (50), with 32 focusing on the UK (plus four focused entirely on England and two on Wales). 15 studies focused on countries in Asia, one on a country in Africa, four North America, one South America, six Australasia, and 10 were international (i.e., they focused on more than one country). Four were historic in nature, in that they referred to historical documents or previous periods in time.

How have the relationships between geography education and citizenship been conceptualized in literature?

Citizenship as informing the purpose of geography education

Our analysis found that a third of the included studies (20) focused on big questions about the purpose of geography education, by exploring the nature of the relationships between geography and citizenship. For example, one article examined “geography’s contribution to making citizens” (Anderson et al. 2008, 34), and another “how geography can contribute to citizenship” (Smyth 2001, 179). 18 articles engaged with ethical or values-based motivations for citizenship in geography education, with Machon (1998, 116) using the phrase “educating for citizenship” to argue for the importance of supporting children to “seek out information, be able to distinguish the worth of that information on ethical grounds and so make judgements that are both conscious and rational”.

When considering the purpose and value of engaging with citizenship in school geography, articles often argued the potential for citizenship in affecting socio-political and/or environmental change through education. The notion of working together and learning for what might be conceptualized as the common good – or a more equitable world (Walkington 1999)—was present in 12 articles. For example, Woolley (2008, 149) argued that citizenship

education can “enable children to challenge the assumptions of society and to address issues of injustice and inequality”, with EAUDE (2020, 54) positing that (global citizenship can) “empower learners of all ages to assume active roles, both locally and globally, in building more peaceful, inclusive and secure societies promoting human rights, gender equality, cultural diversity, tolerance and environmental sustainability”.

Citizenship and engaging with injustices, issues and events in the world

25 articles considered the role of citizenship in engaging with injustices, issues or events in the world. 12 articles argued for the importance of recognizing and valuing plurality and diversity in communities, and six focused specifically on the relationships between race and geography education. For example, Alderman et al. (2023, 411) examined the role of Mississippi Freedom Schools as “volunteer sites for anti-racist learning for Black elementary and secondary students as well as some adults” (411), reflecting that geographies and histories can shape the relationships between (geography) education and activism. Other articles considered how people and place(s) were represented in school geography, with Martin (1995) writing about a collaboration between teachers in Nottinghamshire (England) and PhD students from Cape Coast University of Ghana. Martin examines how images have been used to represent “culturally biased” perspectives in education, before asking questions about what it means to “take the issues of world citizenship and cultural diversity seriously within the geography classroom” (30).

Geopolitics informed the focus on citizenship in geography education in ten articles, through engaging with historical and contemporary issues, events or socio-political contexts. This included questioning whether there was a “new role for geography in citizenship education in the United States” following 9/11 (Bednarz 2003, 72), exploring opportunities for teachers of geography to engage with citizenship when teaching about the Holocaust (Machon and Lambert 2005), and asking “what does it mean to be British?” in geography lessons in England (Keeling and Harper 2009, 21).

A further 14 articles focused on the relationships between sustainability, climate and/or biodiversity change, citizenship and geography education. Articles charted “the emergence of the sustainable citizen within international protocols, national programs of education and learning in the UK and different philosophical traditions” (Bullen and Whitehead 2005, 500) and explored what Morgan (2006) conceptualized as the transformative potential of the relationships between education for sustainable development, global citizenship and geography education. Nordström (2008, 131) considered the relationships between environmental education and multicultural education, arguing that they have:

The same underlying core values of a democratic society, they both emphasise values education, empowerment and active citizenship. Environmental education and multicultural education

also find common ground in treasuring diversity, respect and compassion. They both aim for societal reform by reorienting education and facilitating active personal and social change.

Nordström’s arguments can be seen to reflect that motivations for citizenship education in the literature often lie in empowering young people to co-create more just tomorrows for themselves, their communities and the Earth.

Articles – particularly those published in professional journals—also provided practical examples of how citizenship might be developed in, and through, geography education. Brant (2009, 14) reflects on how she worked with colleagues and the school council in her primary school to develop bronze, silver and gold passports which recognize children’s citizenship, with the aim of encouraging “pupils to make a difference to their local communities” (Brant 2009, 14).

Citizenship and constructions of ‘the child’ in geography education

The construction of ‘the child’ was present in articles in terms of both how the child was framed by the author(s), and/or in the literature/policy/datasets which authors drew from. 17 articles considered (debates about) children as current citizens and 38 articles engaged with (debates about) children as future citizens, or citizens in the making, primarily through considering geography education’s role in preparing children to be citizens. 12 articles considered the role of citizenship education in empowering children to affect change, often making connections to injustices, issues or events in the time-space they were written.

13 articles considered, in some way, children’s geographies or lived citizenship, even if these terms were not used. For example, Wilks (2010) considered the value of engaging with child-friendly cities when reflecting on creative and practical opportunities for citizenship in geography and environmental education. Catling (2003) reflected that the places and environments in which children live, play and study are important sites of personal learning and form experiences and knowledges which they draw upon, and connect to, as they engage with formal (geography) education in schools. Reflections on learning about and/or being able to enact rights were present in seven of the articles.

Our analysis also found that many articles conceptualized children as being and/or becoming different types of citizens, or engaged with policy/literature that did this, through using different adjectives. The use and meaning of these adjectives were found to have different degrees of explanation. 19 articles included a reference to ‘active’ citizenship, with Gerber (2007, 201) arguing that “the focus on being active, participating and caring citizens who promote sustainability is exhorted in geography curricula and policy documents in Western countries”—suggesting a link between active citizenship, participation and care in (some) education policy. Four studies included a focus on ‘critical’ citizens; eight on being an ‘informed’ citizen; nine on being a ‘sustainable/environmental’ citizen; six on being a ‘responsible’ citizen; and two on being an ‘effective’ citizen.

Supporting political literacy and participation in, and through, geography

Nine articles included a focus on developing children's political literacy through teaching about how political systems work. Catling (2003), for example, notes that children become politically aware in primary schools: they may recognize power dynamics at home and in school – including between people with different identities—and engage with news stories about injustices and political systems, with some children choosing to take political action such as protesting war. Machon (1998, 15) argues that it is important to support children to develop their understanding of political systems through geography, and that citizenship can be seen as “the foundation of civic order”—with citizenship education able to support an “ethical imperative” to maintain and improve that order.

Providing children with opportunities to participate and developing children's knowledge of participation in a variety of spaces, was present in 18 articles. Huckle (2002a, 68) contends that the national curricula of the time at Key Stage 3 in England gave too little attention “to social structures, power and politics”—making the case that citizenship education could help to address what he argued was a deficit in geography education. For Huckle, citizenship education can help to provide young people with a “knowledge and understanding of the institutions and systems that influence pupils' lives and communities; how to participate in decision making; the world as a global community; and the issues and challenges of global interdependence and responsibility” (68).

Smyth (2001, 179) also critically reflected on national curricula in England, stating that “developing skills of participation and responsible action” was part of the national programme of study for citizenship at the time – before explaining that the only explicit reference to citizenship in geography curricula was “to explain how places are interdependent and to explore the idea of global citizenship” (DfEE/QCA, 1999, 157, cited in Smyth 2001, 179). This suggests that Smyth perceived a disconnect between the policy intentions and operational guidelines of national (geography) curricula (Priestley and Sinnema 2014), and children's learning about citizenship and opportunities to act as citizens in school geography.

Citizenship and the relationships between identities and place, nation and empire

In terms of the sites and scale of citizenship, 15 articles focused on ‘global’ citizenship, three ‘European’ citizenship, 15 ‘national’ citizenship, six ‘local’ citizenship, and 36 ‘personal’ citizenship – which we conceptualized as referring to a person's identities and lived citizenship (Kallio et al. 2020). Articles engaging with the concept of global citizenship often used guidelines developed by UNESCO (three articles) or non-governmental organizations such as Oxfam (five articles) to frame the discussion.

Three articles focused specifically on place-based education, considering citizenship when exploring local and/or distant places in geography (Tanner 1999). Mentions of

building national identity – or problematisations of this—were present in 18 articles. Evertsson (2015, 259) notes that in the late nineteenth Century “elementary schools in many European countries became part of a centrally initiated nation-building project whose purpose was to create productive and responsible citizens”. Reflecting on the Swedish context, Evertsson goes on to argue that citizenship education “was a way of inculcating certain behaviours and ideas that could strengthen the nation. The focus accordingly was more on citizens' obligations to the nation than on their rights” (268–269).

Dell (2009, 8) raised questions about what it means to be British, arguing for the importance of recognizing different national histories and geographies:

To consider the British we have to consider England, Scotland and Wales, which make up the British Isles, as well as Northern Ireland when considering the United Kingdom as a whole. Each of these countries has their own traditions and differences, which contribute to Britishness and to how, we, the British see ourselves and how we are seen by the rest of the world.

Whilst linguistic, cultural and place-based diversity within the countries that make up the UK is not considered in Dell's article, other papers considered the relationships between identities, communities, places, belonging and citizenship, with Anderson et al. (2008, 34) suggesting that it is here that “citizenship extends into the cultural sphere”. It is also significant to note that there appears to be implicit assumption in Dell's (2009) article that people living in the UK would see themselves as British.

One article (Yong and Marsden 1993, 484) reflected upon the role geography education played in creating citizens in, and for, the British Empire:

In those glorious empire days, geography certainly offered knowledge important for the citizens of the day—the science of distances, the science of the merchant, the statesman and the strategist, which appeared to make a command of geography vital both for the maintenance of the empire itself and the ascent of men to the most acclaimed positions of profit and power within it.

Here, Yong and Marsden appear to advocate for geography education's role in nation- and empire- building, long after the dissolution of empire. Their writing also includes a strongly gendered dimension, further reflecting the role education has, at times, played in (re)producing injustices.

Discussion and conclusions: (Re)imagining possibilities for future research

Whilst recognizing the limitations of this research—not least in its ‘British skew’ and focus only on primary and early secondary education—through examination of the study characteristics and the focus of the included studies, this scoping review has provided insight into the relationships between geography education and citizenship. To conclude the article, we draw attention to the nature of the research reviewed to highlight the importance of engaging with hidden geographies – and the people and places that have

received less attention in geography education research—and the methods by which this might be done. We identify three areas for future research: namely, engaging with children's citizenship; developing children's knowledges of citizenship, political literacy and participation; and curricula constructions of citizenship.

Just under a third of the articles reviewed were published in professional journals, reflecting that geography education is a “practice-orientated field” (Brooks 2018, 5). The contributions from practice-focused scholarship shaped the nature of the methods used, with much of the literature engaging with small-scale studies or being theoretical in nature. 50 of the 60 total included articles focused on at least one country in Europe. This leads to questions about where knowledge in geography education is produced and whose geographies (Massey 2008) are engaged with, or potentially obfuscated, in geography education research. Future research into geography education's relationships with citizenship in different times and places – as well as in different education phases and spaces—is therefore important in furthering knowledge about how place- and policy- based factors shape the nature and purpose of citizenship's positioning in geography. Moving forward, reviewing literature written in languages other than English is also crucial to support engagement with a wider range of publications, debates, and conceptualisations of citizenship and geography education.

Only one article included data collected with, from, or by children, suggesting a lack of direct engagement with children in geography education research (Hammond 2022). In addition, nearly two thirds of articles reviewed, in some way, considered ‘the child’ as a citizen-in-the-making. The lack of engagement with children's perspectives, along with what might be conceptualized as a dominant view of children as becoming citizens in geography education research, is significant to note as social and political processes shape children's lives and citizenship (Kallio et al. 2020). Children live in places, but their bodies and lives are intertwined with the global, including through what Katz (2025) has described as a kind of intimate geopolitics. As recent work by Wood (2022) has theorized, as well as *becoming* citizens, young people are often actively *being* citizens and *doing* citizenship, shaping lives, communities and places.

Moving forward, we advocate for research that directly engages with children's – in different places and with different identities—experiences and imaginations of (their own) citizenship and citizenship in geography education. This work is important for producing knowledge about: the relationships between children's lived citizenship and citizenship in school geography; the experiences of marginalized and undocumented children when learning about, through and for, citizenship; whether children perceive geography education as supportive of their citizenship and knowledges of citizenship; and whether curricula, pedagogies and assessment in geography support children in acting as citizens in education spaces and beyond the school gate. Methods which support children to shape and participate in this work are vital for ensuring that their experiences and imaginations are engaged with in, and through, research, and are used to inform policy and practice.

The current review identified that developing children's political literacy and participation through geography was a major motivation for engaging with citizenship in school geography. In addition, the importance of engaging with political geographies was highlighted by articles that argued the value of engaging with injustices, issues and events in the world. However, it is important to note that articles often paid more attention to geographical processes and issues, and less to children's geographies and experiences of geopolitical events or injustices. Yet, making connections between children's “biophysical and social” embodied relations with the world and their lived citizenship in places and communities, and the macro-geographies, processes and events in distant places that shape these (Ansell 2009, 200), is an important area of attention for geography education research and practice.

We therefore suggest that future research should examine perspectives on if, and how, school geography supports children to engage with political geographies. This work should also consider how geography education can support children's participation and political literacy through curricula, pedagogies and assessment, whilst considering the factors which shape and constrain geography education. For example, state level education policy has sometimes sought to suppress the discussion of political issues in schools (see for instance the DfE 2025 policy for England) and a rise in far-right movements across the world may shape teachers' decision making and children's geographies. Huckel's (2002b, 147) conceptualization of “overlapping dynamic networks of power”—which impact upon a citizen's status, rights and feelings of belonging in places and communities – could provide a useful framework for engaging with the (relationships between) the different sites and scales of citizenship in school geography.

Finally, while the reviewed literature used various adjectives to describe types of citizens, different degrees of explanation were present as to what those adjectives meant. As Cassidy (2018) has considered in relation to Scottish education policy, a lack of explanation around terms such as ‘responsible citizen’ can lead to confusion among educators and children as to what is meant by the term. Future research could focus on how citizenship is constructed in the policy intentions and operational guidelines of geography curricula in different contexts (Priestley and Sinnema 2014). This work could also examine how curricula constructions of citizenship are understood by children, educators, parents/carers and others, paying attention to any differences in views, what shapes these differences, and how any tensions are explored or resolved. Whilst there are numerous possibilities for future work, we conclude by arguing for the importance of engaging with and supporting children's citizenship and participation in geography education research.

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